

References

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The Encyclopedia of the Paranormal edited by Gordon Stein. Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1996, 859 pp. \$149.95 (C). ISBN 1-57392-021-5.

In recent times there have been several encyclopedias whose purpose is to summarize aspects of parapsychology and other unorthodox fields for the general public. Stein's *Encyclopedia of the Paranormal* is the most recent of this genre. However, unlike previous reference works of this sort, the entries in this book are written by a variety of authors and are generally slanted towards a skeptical perspective. That is, with some exceptions, most of the writers of the entries do not accept the validity of claims made by the proponents of the paranormal and have much to say about the unreliability and lack of validity of research in parapsychology and other areas. Having a more skeptical work helps to balance the excess of credulity that abound around these topics. Many of these views are expressed in the encyclopedia by such authors as James Alcock, Robert Baker, Barry Beyerstein, Paul Edwards, Martin Gardner, Ray Hyman, and Joe Nickell, among many others. The few authors who write more positively of the existence of paranormal phenomena include Alan Gauld, Andrew MacKenzie, Daryl Bem, and Robert Morris.

The topics cover a wide range of aspects of the paranormal. Some entries focus on psychological phenomena that have some relevance to our interpretation of what many consider to be paranormal (*e.g.*, altered states of consciousness, cryptomnesia, hypnosis). Others discuss fields or general areas of study (*e.g.*, astrology, cryptozoology, palmistry, parapsychology), general problems or perspectives on the fields in question (*e.g.*, magic and *psi*, media and the paranormal, photography, statistics and the paranormal), particular claims or phenomena (*e.g.*, cattle mutilations, extrasensory perception, psychokinesis, spontaneous human combustion), and attitudes or philosophical perspectives (*e.g.*, New Age thinking, Satan and Satanism, scientific creationism, skepticism and the paranormal). In addition, there are entries on individuals who were associated with particular claims. These include mediums Leonora Piper and Eusapia Palladino, and such individuals as Carlos Castañeda and Don Juan, Nostradamus, and Sai Baba. In addition to alphabetical listing, an index facilitates searches for these and other topics.

Several entries deserve mention for their thoroughness. The entries by Susan Blackmore on near-death-experiences and out-of-body experiences are very complete and informative. I found Stanley Krippner and Michael Winkler's entry on "The Need to Believe" particularly valuable in that, unlike

most discussions on the topic, the authors also consider the need to disbelieve, presenting a model that may inspire further research on the subject. Marcello Truzzi's comprehensive discussion of "Pseudoscience" brings together a large literature from the philosophy and sociology of science that shows the complexity of the issues involved and the problems of using simple demarcation criteria and simple definitions of what is scientific or what is not.

Although presumably not intended as such, this work can be seen as a skeptical manifesto on the wide range of the paranormal. As such, it balances the perspectives presented by believers and more neutral observers and students of these subjects in other similar works. Much of what is said is common sense, alerting everyone to the possibility of alternate explanations for a variety of claims. An example of this is the entry on psychic healing by Christopher French. But regardless of these virtues, I would argue that there are several ways in which the critical and skeptical view that characterizes this work could have been improved. I will list some of them.

1. *Missing entries.* Although it is not possible to cover all relevant topics, there are some omissions that are puzzling because they are important issues and phenomena to discuss critically. For example, the entry "Unidentified Flying Objects" does not provide sufficient coverage of the vast field of UFO studies. Taking discussions of parapsychological claims as a guide, one would expect more detailed information on important individuals (e.g., George Adamski), incidents (e.g., the Roswell case), and general issues (e.g., UFO abductions). These topics are very popular and influential and, as such, deserve more than passing mentions. The treatment of UFOs is one of the weaker aspects of this encyclopedia.

Similarly, cryptozoology is surveyed less well than expected. Although Henry Bauer's entry on this topic is comprehensive, the encyclopedia should have contained more information about specific "creatures". Readers will undoubtedly search for dinosaurs or sea serpents, or such specific "creatures" as Champ, Ogopogo, and the Loch Ness Monster, and be disappointed.

Although the problem of fraud is mentioned in many entries, the topic does not receive attention in its own entry. This is a pity, in that such expanded coverage would have allowed a more in-depth discussion of the psychology of fraud, including the motivations for and rewards of fraudulent practices. One also wonders why there is no entry on auras, a phenomenon discussed by many and one that is central to a variety of systems of thought and healing practices. In addition, it is equally regrettable that there was no entry on Kirlian photography. The short discussion in the entry on photography (p. 522-523) does not adequately cover the methodological problems of this topic. Kirlian photography is one of those "supporting" claims cited by every believer in auras, and as such, needs to be discussed in much more detail than is presented in this book.

Stein argues in the introduction of *The Encyclopedia of the Paranormal* that some topics were not discussed because he did not know of qualified

individuals to do so. Although that may apply to some topics, this certainly does not apply to UFOs, Kirlian photography, or auras.

2. *Excessively long entries.* Although there is a clear need for more information about many topics, some of the entries are overly long, including those on astrology (Geoffrey Dean, Arthur Mather, Ivan Kelly), CSICOP (Kendrick Frazier), and reincarnation (Paul Edwards). These, and other entries, could have benefitted from tighter editorial control. The best of them are only too long; the worst are, frankly, rambling and repetitive.

3. *Missing information.* Although many of the entries are fairly comprehensive, some of them miss basic information about important classic studies that should appear in any work claiming to be a reference encyclopedia. For example, there are no mentions of the studies of Louisa Rhine and Ian Stevenson (entry on "Prophetic Dreams"), Flournoy's work with Hélène Smith ("Channeling"), Stevenson's important discussion of cryptomnesia and the criteria proposed for the use of the concept ("Cryptomnesia"), and studies of developmental correlates and absorption correlates of hypnotic susceptibility ("Hypnosis"). In other cases the entries lack important critical information that should be present in a skeptical encyclopedia.

For example, the entry "The Medium Margery" does not include evidence unearthed by Tietze and presented in his book *Margery* which discusses both Malcolm Bird's observations and discovery of fraud on the part of the medium and Bird's concealment of that fraud. Similarly, although the entry on "Jung and the Paranormal" mentions the incidents of loud noises in Freud's bookcases when Jung was present, it does not mention a later letter Freud wrote to Jung in which he (Freud) said the sounds happened at later occasions, suggesting conventional explanations for the original event.

Other problems arise from undocumented fraud claims. For example, Martin Gardner, in his entry on the medium Leonora Piper, claims that the records of her seances contain evidence of fraud, in the form of the medium's attempt to fish out information from the sitters. In his entry on D. D. Home, Gordon Stein claims that Home was privately "caught in fraud several times" (p. 329). Unfortunately, neither of these authors present any evidence to support their accusations.

It is not good enough to claim that space considerations preclude discussions of these issues, or that the evidence appears elsewhere. As writers of encyclopedia entries, these authors have the responsibility of providing support for strong accusations such as these, especially when the encyclopedia is likely to be used by individuals who know little or nothing about these mediums, nor about the likely sources of information that might have been consulted.

Although Barry Beyerstein's entries on "Altered States of Consciousness," "Possession and Exorcism," and "Visions and Hallucinations" provide good discussions of the psychology and neuropsychology of the phenomena in question, there is no attempt to relate these topics to the overall concerns of the encyclopedia: a critical and skeptical analysis of claims of the paranormal. I

would argue that these concerns would have been better addressed if the author had discussed the claims presented for a relationship between altered states and hallucinations to ESP claims. Also, he should have analyzed actual possession cases that have been reported to include such phenomena as levitation and xenoglossy, as well as the well-known writings of individuals like Corrado Balducci which claim that "real" possession exists, and that such possessions shows its nature through paranormal phenomena. Again, if one wants to critically analyze claims of the paranormal, one needs to examine relevant evidence presented in support of the claim.

4. *Failure to discuss the point of view of the "other"*. A common problem in reference works is that the writers only consider their particular viewpoint, without representing the views of others. This does not happen in every entry of this encyclopedia, but it happens frequently enough to affect the quality of the reference work.

For example, in his discussion of reincarnation, Paul Edwards mentions some criticisms of Stevenson's work by such authors as Roll and Chari (p. 650-651). But Edwards does not refer the reader to Stevenson's counter replies nor to James Matlock's discussion of these criticisms in his comprehensive review of reincarnation research published in the sixth volume of *Advances in Parapsychological Research*. Similarly, in his entry "Extrasensory Perception," Alcock noted that Hyman published a commentary on Bem and Honorton's well-known ganzfeld paper published in the *Psychological Bulletin*. Alcock pointed out that Hyman had highlighted inconsistencies in Honorton's earlier findings. However, Alcock forgot to mention that Bem replied to Hyman's paper and reported analyses that disconfirmed Hyman's criticism. French's entry on psychokinesis suffers from a similar problem when he brings up the well-known criticism of the PEAR PK work which contends that one subject's results explained most of the significance of the studies, and that this subject was a staff member (p. 611). The PEAR group's replies to these criticisms, which included statistical analysis directly contradicting the "single subject" hypotheses are not mentioned.

Authors of encyclopedia entries may, of course, express their own opinion on controversy, but they have the responsibility to present the whole picture of the issue first.

5. *Exaggerated claims*. Many authors of this encyclopedia make the point repetitiously that the world of the paranormal is full of exaggerated claims. This is true, of course, as seen, for example, in Eugene Emery's entry "The Media and the Paranormal." But it is also unfortunate that the criticism of the paranormal is also full of exaggerated claims. Some, such as Alcock when he writes about ESP, make the point that evidence for ESP depends too much on statistical analyses. Although true, his concerns will be seen as exaggerated in the eyes of those scientists who work in psychology and physics, among other areas, and whose results are similarly dependent on statistical analyses.

Unfortunately, recent remarks by critics of parapsychology regarding the "problems" with dependence on statistical analysis do not realize that they are hurting their own credibility by presenting vague statements that are not widely accepted by the scientific community. Other exaggerated claims are found in arguments for the acceptance of conventional explanations. Blackmore (p. 478), for example, affirms that psychological theories of the out-of-body experience can explain much of the experience's phenomenology.

I would argue that although the psychological theories are promising, they still are too underdeveloped to offer much explanatory power. Similarly, Baker seems to take much too seriously an anecdote described by a colleague in which a sensory explanation is offered for what some will call an ESP experience (p. 560). The anecdote may illustrate the point, but reliance on such flimsy evidence in support of a psychological process signals a double standard, when one remembers that anecdotal evidence is strongly disparaged by critics when it is offered as support of paranormal claims.

Although the above mentioned problems reduce the value of this encyclopedia, the work is still a useful contribution to its subject matter. Many of the concerns listed in this work are shared by numerous investigators of the paranormal, and others will remind us why there still is resistance to proponent's claims.

I have listed some problems in the book that I think hinder the message many of the authors of the encyclopedia want to convey. But there is one other problem that I would like to address that is not directly concerned with the encyclopedia. Paul Kurtz has argued in this work that: "The key point of skepticism is not doubt . . . but *inquiry*; skepticism is only one element in the process of inquiry. It is not the belief or disbelief that is the main issue, but the facts, theories, and methods of verification" (p. 699). The problem is that the skeptical approach in general seems to avoid active (empirical) inquiry altogether, limiting itself to armchair criticism. While many of the writers of this encyclopedia have much to offer in their critical analyses (one important aspect of scientific inquiry), they fail to bring to their work a necessary part of science: empirical research.

In science, a claim needs to be accompanied by supporting empirical data. However, a good proportion of the work of critics is limited to enumerating possible flaws and then stating that the case for the paranormal has not been proven. How much more productive it would be if critics engaged in research themselves. Conventional explanations of paranormal claims — fantasy, dissociation, sensory cues, motivated recollection, and so on — need to be tested in new research. Instead, critics generally use the name of science, or talk about inquiry, but refrain from actively taking part as scientists *in the sense of engaging in research*.

Certainly not every hypothesis or model can be easily tested, and there is logic and value in armchair work. But many of these skeptical speculations,

such as those presented in this book, would be more acceptable if they were accompanied by empirical work testing the speculations.

One hopes that the skeptical viewpoints expressed in this volume will inform those who do research in ufology, parapsychology, cryptozoology and other fields. But likewise, it would be more constructive if many of the critics of these fields would develop their own research programs, utilizing the tools of science they all cherish and recommend that others use.

A deeper understanding of the topics discussed in the encyclopedia would result if both sides of the argument engaged in competing research programs. Some of these programs could follow conventional approaches and thus have the potential of teaching us much about the physics, psychology, neuropsychology and other aspects of the "paranormal". This course of action would eventually provide us with enough information to revise this encyclopedia so that its contents would reflect a more empirically based skepticism.

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The AIDS Cult: Essays on the Gay Health Crisis by John Lauritsen & Ian Young, eds. Provincetown: ASKLEPIOS (Box 1902, Provincetown MA 02657-0245, 1997. 223 pp. \$15 (p). ISBN 0-943742-10-2.

That HIV is not the sufficient and necessary cause of AIDS continues to be argued by some mainstream scientists (see reviews in *JSE* Vol. 10, no. 3, 1996: 430-42); indeed, the ranks of those who take this view are swelling — see the lists of names and other information at <http://www.xs4all.nl/~raido/>. The present collection of essays takes as a medical given that HIV=AIDS is wrong and considers psycho-social and psychosomatic factors. The discussions are relevant to psychosomatic illness, social psychology, faith-healing, alternative medicine.

The first essay, "The group-fantasy origins of AIDS," is reprinted from *Journal of Psychohistory* (Summer 1984). It is by Casper Schmidt, M.D. and psychoanalyst, and will not find much favor with those who dislike dogmatic Freudian assertiveness expressed in sweeping generalizations, say "China is ignored as a superpower for purposes of fantasy, since one has only two parents" (p. 38) or "This curb on phallic-assertiveness created a feeling of gender dysphoria, which was then injected into the nation's homosexuals in fantasy" (p. 39). However, some indubitably substantive points are made:

- The scapegoating of lepers during the Middle Ages bears similarities to attitudes toward PWAs (People With AIDS) nowadays.
- *Epidemic hysteria* is a well attested phenomenon. Schmidt gives useful references to the literature about this, mentioning several items that